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Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5864th meeting

Monday, 14 April 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Kumalo	(South Africa)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Belle
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kravchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Sixteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2008/183)

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08-30407 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Sixteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2008/183)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Liberia, in which she requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mrs. Osode (Liberia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia.

It is so decided.

I invite Ms. Løj to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/183, which contains the sixteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Løj: Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to present the sixteenth progress report (S/2008/183) of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). In doing so, I extend my appreciation to the members of the Security Council for their strong support for the work of the Mission.

Significant progress has been made since the Council was briefed in September 2007 by my predecessor, Mr. Alan Doss. The Secretary-General's report that is before the Council provides an update on major developments in Liberia and the progress made in meeting the core benchmarks for the consolidation phase of UNMIL's consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal plan. On the basis of those and the progress achieved, benchmarks for the drawdown phase have been developed in close consultation with the Government of Liberia and international partners.

Since the report has recently been released, I need not go through it in detail. I will instead focus on a number of critical areas that need to be addressed for further progress in Liberia and to enable the United Nations Mission in Liberia to successfully draw down.

Members of the Council know that I took up my duties as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Liberia just three months ago. But most members will also know that, in my previous capacity, I followed developments in Liberia closely during 2005 and 2006 as Chairman of the Security Council's Sanctions Committee on Liberia and, in that capacity, first visited the country in April 2006.

Let me assure the Council that what has been accomplished in the two years since then under the dedicated and hardworking leadership of Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and her Government is truly amazing and highly commendable. But nowhere is it illustrated more clearly than in Liberia how closely peacebuilding and peacekeeping are linked. Nowhere is it illustrated more clearly than in Liberia that there will be no sustainable security without development and that there will be no development without sustainable security.

Steady progress has been achieved during the past two years in Liberia, including in the most recent reporting period, and the overall situation remains stable. But the security situation is fragile, and further progress is needed in a number of areas to truly solidify progress. The challenges relate to security, the

rule of law, governance and economic development — all of which are closely interlinked. Those challenges have guided the formulation of the drawdown benchmarks that have been presented in the Secretary-General's report. At this critical juncture of Liberia's recovery, I would like in particular to highlight three critical areas that will need special attention: the reform of the security sector, not least the reform of the Liberian National Police; the reform of rule of law institutions; and the effective implementation of the new poverty reduction strategy and the priority task of addressing the high unemployment rate.

The security situation along Liberia's borders with three neighbouring countries was calm during the reporting period, but the situation on all three borders is closely monitored by UNMIL. Unrest in any of Liberia's neighbouring countries will have immediate negative consequences for the security situation in Liberia, and vice versa. In that respect, it is not only the political developments that should be closely monitored; we also need to constantly assess the potential negative consequences of the increasing use of some countries in the subregion as transit points for international drug trafficking. That is in addition to the occasional civil unrest due to sharp increases in the price of rice and gasoline.

Internally, the security situation in Liberia remains fragile. There continue to be occasional violent incidents on rubber plantations and in diamond-mining areas. The crime rate, in relation to both armed robberies and rape, remains high, and, in many of the reported rape cases, the victims are young girls — or rather children. In addition, there have been an increasing number of incidents of mob violence and attempts to administer mob justice, including attacks on police personnel and police stations by angry crowds who want to assault and even kill crime suspects being detained by the police. That is a clear sign of lack of trust in the security and justice system and of a readiness — as during the years of conflict — on the part of citizens to continue to fend for themselves. UNMIL itself has recently been a target of such action, when former UNMIL individual contractors carried out a violent protest during which three staff members were injured and two UNMIL vehicles were set ablaze.

These security incidents highlight the need for the Government to finalize the national security strategy and the reforms of the security institutions. These efforts are ongoing, but at a slower pace than originally planned. Progress is being made in the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia, and it is my hope that this tempo will be sustained. Any further delays will make it impossible for the new army to be fully operational before late 2009 and would impact directly on the timeline for the UNMIL drawdown plan.

The reform of the Liberian National Police (LNP) constitutes a bigger challenge at this point. The LNP still needs to gain the trust of the Liberian population. As of 30 June 2007, we had achieved the quantitative benchmark of providing basic training for 3,500 police officers. However, we now need to focus on improving the quality and professionalism of the individual police officers, enhancing the management structure and providing the LNP with the equipment and resources necessary to perform effectively. Recent disciplinary problems within the LNP have also raised the issue of the effectiveness of the vetting procedures for the new LNP. The Government of Liberia and UNMIL are now looking at ways to review the process, including through a verification exercise.

In the meantime, the development of the Emergency Response Unit within the police force is making progress. The training of the first batch of 90 officers has commenced. This process is, however, encountering some delays and funding gaps, which need to be addressed soon. In that regard, I wish to thank the Governments of the United States and Ireland, which have so far provided funding for the programme. But additional funds are needed from international partners, both to ensure a more effective functioning of the LNP and for the Unit to be operational by July 2009.

Despite efforts by the Government of Liberia to enhance the rule of law, deficiencies in the justice system continue to pose serious challenges to the administration of justice countrywide. These include the lack of adequate funding; a shortage of qualified judicial officials; the lack of infrastructure, including courts and prisons; inadequate numbers of qualified judicial and legal officers; poor case management; low salaries; and corruption. As a result of those deficiencies, many Liberians have little confidence in the justice system.

The lack of confidence in the rule of law institutions of Liberia, and especially in the LNP and

the judicial system, deserves urgent attention. That will require not only improvements in the performance of law enforcement and judicial institutions, but equally important, a reorientation in the mindset of the population, which is too quick to resort to extrajudicial measures. In that regard, I am pleased to report that the Government held a Cabinet retreat in March, during which the problems in the rule of law sector, in particular the police and judicial institutions, were discussed and it was agreed to address them as a matter of priority.

UNMIL is collaborating with the Government to examine these problems and come up with solutions. A rule of law retreat is being planned to bring the executive and judiciary together at the national level to address those problems. UNMIL and the Government also recently held a joint forum to discuss the disturbing phenomenon of attacks on police and police stations. UNMIL is encouraged by the Government's plan to address those problems in a holistic manner. We have also undertaken a funding gap analysis to identify the resources — both recurrent and capital — that will be required over the next years for the full development of the LNP.

The incidence of gender-based violence in Liberia, in particular rape, is simply unacceptable. I am, however, pleased to report that with the support of UNMIL and the United Nations country team, the Government is in the process of finalizing the national gender policy. It has also developed a national action plan against gender-based violence to deter and prosecute rape cases. A special court created to prosecute rape cases will hopefully give teeth to the new rape law. But again, plans alone cannot do the trick. The mindset of Liberians committing these crimes — often against young children — simply must change. The Government of Liberia and all other relevant groups working to bring about positive change in this matter deserve the support of the international community.

I am also glad to report that the public hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are going along well. A number of witnesses, including perpetrators and victims, have come before the Commission, both in Monrovia and in the counties, to give accounts of their experiences during the war. It is, however, disappointing that none of the major actors have so far testified. That does not augur well for the reconciliation process. I therefore wish to repeat the call of the Secretary-General to all Liberians to cooperate with the Commission in order to move the process forward. I also urge the international community to provide the Commission with the funding support it urgently needs to fulfil its mandate.

Liberia's new national poverty reduction strategy has been finalized. It has been based on a grass-roots participatory process, with ordinary citizens making inputs into the development agenda. That is very positive, but, of course, it has also raised expectations among Liberians, who want to see tangible results. The implementation of the strategy will not be easy, especially given the limited national implementation capacity available. And economic growth is urgently needed, especially in order to reduce the high unemployment rate, which also constitutes a serious security concern.

However, even if revenue collection can be enhanced and if the ambitious economic growth projections can be achieved, a significant funding gap will still need to be covered by external contributions. The Government will therefore need all the support it can get from international partners. In that regard, the upcoming Partners Forum, expected to be held during the last week of June in Berlin, will be a critical milestone. It is important that all development partners use the poverty reduction strategy as the framework for their activities.

March was a historic month for Liberia, not just because of the completion of the poverty reduction strategy, but also because the country reached the decision point under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, as announced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The next step will be for Liberia to reach the HIPC completion point. If that is to happen, successful implementation of the poverty reduction strategy and of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme will be critical. In that respect, the progress made within the framework of the Programme is encouraging.

The Mission and the United Nations country team have continued to strengthen efforts to prevent or penalize sexual abuse and exploitation. That is being done through preventive measures, including extensive training, as well as through the prompt investigation of cases and the implementation of disciplinary measures when allegations have been substantiated. I am proud

to say that our efforts have been yielding good results, as reflected in the significant reduction in the number of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse that were reported during the most recent reporting period. We will, however, not rest on our laurels.

In compliance with Security Council resolution 1777 (2007), the drawdown process of UNMIL has commenced. A battalion each from Namibia and Bangladesh has been withdrawn, while the Ghanaian and Nigerian battalions have been reduced by one company each. Another battalion, from Senegal, will be repatriated in June 2008. By 30 September, 2,450 troops will have been repatriated, leaving the Mission's troop strength at 11,691. With regard to the police component, its drawdown will begin before the end of this month: 498 police advisers will depart the Mission in seven stages between now and December 2010, bringing the police strength to 742 personnel by December 2010. We have also been making appropriate adjustments to the civilian staffing of the Mission.

The drawdown of UNMIL is being carried out in a well planned manner so as to minimize threats to the security of the State. The process will also ensure that UNMIL is able to assist the Government in dealing with any serious disruptions or civil disturbances. The drawdown plan is intended to provide the time and space needed for Liberia to build up its own police and military forces and progressively to assume full responsibility for national security.

The drawdown is also being implemented taking into consideration developments in the immediate subregion. UNMIL's military personnel continue to maintain a high level of vigilance in the border areas in order to discourage any cross-border trafficking in weapons or people. However, UNMIL is not in control of events outside Liberia's borders, and we will therefore need to continue to be prudent as we proceed with the troop adjustments, so as not to put the gains we have made at risk, not only for Liberia, but for the subregion as a whole.

Let me conclude by stating that Liberia today is a place of hope, characterized by many positive developments. The country has been free of conflict for the past four years, and there is good news coming out of Liberia. However, the hope and the tranquillity that we see today are tempered by a tenuous and fragile peace. Liberia is still a place where one can wake up in the morning and hear that an argument between two fish sellers in a market has degenerated into an ethnic problem with a wider threat that a house of worship will be burned down. Liberia is still a place where rumours about ritual killings or disappearances can suddenly lead to the burning down of a police station or an attack on Liberian and UNMIL security forces and United Nations vehicles. The security of Liberia continues to rely heavily on the presence of UNMIL military and police forces. That is clear evidence that peace has not taken firm root and that it is not yet time to declare victory and leave the country.

Finally, allow me to express our gratitude to troop-contributing and civilian-police-contributing countries, the personnel of UNMIL and the United Nations country team, as well as to the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, national and international non-governmental organizations and our bilateral and multilateral partners, which have so tirelessly pursued the cause of peace in Liberia. Together with the excellent cooperation of the Government and all Liberian partners, that makes it truly rewarding — although challenging — to serve as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Liberia. We count on the Security Council's continued support in our endeavours.

The President: I thank Ms. Løj for her briefing.

There are no further speakers on my list. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.